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By Donna Borak

In an effort to beseech the United States to intervene against the Chinese government's numerous religious persecutions, Christian religious groups based in Texas pleaded their case on Capitol Hill in a hearing held on Wednesday.

"Mr. Chairman, I regret to inform you that I do not have any good news for you today," said Joseph M.C. Kung, president of the Cardinal Kung Foundation in his opening statement. "The arrests and atrocities that I reported to you two years ago continue unabated. ... Random arrests of religious and other faithful are still being made."

Kung's testimonies, among others given before the Executive Congressional Committee on China, depicted a bleak picture of a country that has struggled in its slow transition to modernity and has been caught in an internal war between government loyalty and religious freedom. The religious persecutions occurring in China is only one example of this internal war that has been pushed to the forefront by these American Christian groups.

The testimonies and evidence given by the China Aid Association and the Cardinal Kung Foundation, both non-profit organizations whose sole aim is to end the religious persecution occurring in China, demonstrated the immense loss of religious freedom all over the country.

They described a country where churches are being demolished, elderly Christian pastors are brutally tortured, women are raped and Christians live in fear of being placed under house arrest, kidnapped or are imprisoned for printing biblical literature, hymn books or sending their grandchildren to Sunday school.

Kung's testimony was filled with accounts of kidnappings and tortures of bishops, including a message sent by one bishop who chose to remain anonymous for sake of political repercussions.

In his plea to the United States, the bishop said that since the communist takeover in China in 1949, "tens of thousands of bishops, priests and faithful have been arrested and have been placed in jail for 10, 20, 30, or 40 years." He said that some have died in jail; others have been released and have died shortly after.

"It does not matter to the government if they are dead or still alive; they are still considered criminals because their "criminal" charges were never erased by the government," said the anonymous bishop. The bishop requested that the U.S. government work with the Chinese government to exonerate these individuals from these so-called crimes.

In a careful response, Chairman Jim Leach, R-Iowa, said that to clear the names was "a common sense request" with which no civilized human being could not concur. He told Kung that he would send the bishop's request to the executive branch, where it would be specifically dealt with.

Leach abhorred the anonymity of the dead, saying there was no reason for a person to die as a martyr. Pointing to quarter-inch thick document -- placed into evidence by Bob Fu, president of the China Aid Association that listed the 6,000 Christians arrested, kidnapped and imprisoned -- Leach said, "Lists are important because they respect lives."

According to the China Aid Association, 80 million Christians live in China in fear of religious persecution. The CAA presented a "secret document" to the commission, obtained by an insider of the Chinese government, which outlined the government's current plans to crack down even further on the faithful or any attempts by Chinese citizens to Westernize.

"Fatuity and superstition are opposed, and evil teachings and heterodoxy are boycotted," read the document, titled "Notice on Further Strengthening Marxist Atheism Research Propaganda and Education" dated May 27, 2004.

The document was released jointly by several Communist Party departments, including the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communists Party. Its stated purpose was to shed light on "the new situation to target the cultic organization of 'Falungong' and various pseudo-science and superstitions, and the new trend toward Western hostile forces' attempting to 'Westernize' and 'disintegrate' China in the name of religion."

The notice demanded that Communist Party Schools and officials "increase the proportion of Marxist atheism propaganda and education" in elementary and high schools.

**U.S. chair on Commission of International Religious Freedom**, Preeta Bansal, suggested that current bilateral talks between the United States and China should be revised given the fact that no benchmarks have been established, no goals stated publicly and a lack of transparency. Also recommended were multilateral talks with the United Nations.

"It is very difficult for outside experts and groups to evaluate what was said, what was wrong, and what was accomplished," said Bansal.

She also suggested that the committee itself act as liaison among Congress and appropriate state agencies to coordinate a national scale effort to promote human rights and support religious freedom.

"We think that Congress and this committee in particular could play a great role in developing interagency dialogue and interagency communication ... in making sure that all parts of the federal government speak in the same voice when it comes to human rights issues."

However, Prof. Pitman B. Potter, director of Chinese legal studies at University of British Columbia, presented a much more laissez faire approach to China, describing the country as being in a state of transition that showed evidence of re-evaluation. He said the United States should help China examine its own social condition before engaging in reform. He said any changes should be sought by the Chinese government after a careful look at its own legal procedure.

"We should be looking for a way to invite China to examine its own legal system," said Potter.

"China is a state of transition. That transition is not complete, and we do not have a firm understanding of where it is going."

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